

Every Person

who has reasonable grounds to suspect in the course of the person's professional or official duties that a **child** has suffered or is suffering from **abuse** that may have been caused or permitted by a person who has or has had charge of the child shall forthwith **report** the suspected abuse **to a children's aid society**

(Child Welfare Act, 1978, Section 49 (2).)

“Every person who contravenes subsection 2 of section 49 is guilty of an offence and on summary conviction by the court is liable to a fine of not more than \$1,000.”

(Section 94 (1) (f) (ii))

The new Ontario Child Welfare Act reflects mounting public concern over violence to and neglect of children. Reports of child abuse have more than doubled in the past five years.

You may already have encountered victims of child abuse, particularly if your work brings you into frequent contact with young people. You may or may not have recognized the signs of violence or neglect. Perhaps you responded to it or reported it.

You may not have known what to do.

Perhaps you did nothing.

What will you do next time?

Under the new Child Welfare Act, the children's aid society must report *verified* cases of child abuse to the Central Register, an information bank to follow the progress of abused children, to monitor existing child abuse programmes in Ontario, and to research improved methods of protection and prevention. Alleged abusers are notified, and informed that they can inspect the information, appeal to have errors corrected or to have their names removed from it.

Do you think that interference will only make things worse, or that community services simply aren't adequate to affect the situation?

Experts in the field predict that at least three quarters of the parents or parent-substitutes who injure, neglect or molest their children can be helped, but only through imaginative programmes that engage the experience and talents of workers in a wide range of vocations, with the support of the whole community. Isn't it worth the effort?

Do you feel others are better placed or trained to intervene? In your work you get a unique view of a young person's life, health and behaviour. Your special judgement is indispensable. If you are still uncertain, consult with colleagues, share your observations and concerns with others inside and outside your field. Your range of effect can be expanded more than you might think. Action from you alone could save a life.

Your action in concert with others' could eventually protect most children from violence and neglect.

Legislation can't prevent child abuse.

Only people can.

You.

A **child** as defined in this law is a person under the age of sixteen.

Abuse occurs if a person who has the care or custody of a child causes or allows the child to suffer:

- “physical harm”: external or internal bruises, burns, fractures, wounds, brain damage, poisoning, etc. or
- “malnutrition (including dehydration) or mental ill-health of a degree that if not immediately remedied could seriously impair growth and development, or result in permanent injury or death,” or
- “sexual molestation”

Professional action is often hindered by popular myths.

- *parenting is an easily acquired skill.*
- *parents have the right to discipline their children without interference.*
- *sexual abusers are strangers.*
- *normal people couldn't really harm their own children.*
- *reporting child abuse is meddling in the privacy of the home.*

Professional action can dispel such myths, this is why the law has placed special responsibility on the professional.

A case of suspected abuse should be reported immediately to the area children's aid society, sometimes entitled Family and Children's Services, even if it involves confidential or privileged information. Only solicitor-client privilege is protected under this law. But anyone who reports suspected violence or neglect is guaranteed protection from civil liability, "unless the giving of the information is done maliciously or without reasonable grounds to suspect that the information is true." A children's aid social worker will investigate each report discreetly, if necessary requesting police involvement or the help, as required and available, of other professional and community resource people. The society's first duty is to protect a child from immediate harm, and to prevent further or more serious damage.

Violence or neglect if ignored is likely to get worse. Can you recognize its signs, distinguish it from accidental injury, disease or poverty? Some parents' or children's explanations for injuries make sense, others don't. Some behaviour should warn you of abuse, some shouldn't. Can you tell the difference?

A child's life or health may depend on your actions. Can you deal effectively with parents you suspect of abuse, even if you know them well? Can you cope with your own anger or revulsion?

You can learn. *Child abuse information is available. Increasingly varied and specialized literature, audio-visual materials, training programmes and public education seminars now exist. Ask at your local library, professional association or children's aid society. Is there a child abuse team where you live? Why not look into it today.*



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**Talk to the children's aid society
in your area. The number is in the
directory.**



Ontario

**Ministry of
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